Article on the Adams Woods in Concord and Lincoln, MA by Ray Angelo in the Concord Journal (November 20, 1980) and letter of August 2, 1981 from John Quincy Adams (1907-2003) to Ray Angelo

What a piece of work is Adams Woods

By Ray Angelo

Owing to its retired location, relatively few Concord or Lincoln residents are able to picture the Adams Land beyond a parcel of woodland with, perhaps, some horsetrails running through it. Commuters on the B & M train between Concord Center and Lincoln look into the Adams woods whenever they gaze out their windows south and west between Walden Pond and Baker Bridge. Some might notice a few deep hollows close to the tracks. Two of these are miniature bogs, pieces of the cold north country left behind like calling cards by the glacier that retreated 10,000 years ago.

The southernmost hollow by the tracks in Lincoln is actually the beginning of a charming vale through which a brook runs from the railroad to Fairhaven Bay. Heywood Brook (or Spanish Brook) forms the southern boundary of the Adams property in Lincoln. It was a favorite haunt of Emerson and Thoreau. The former considered it one of "Concord's Enchanted Places"; the latter referred to the sound of its waters as "inexpressibly refreshing to my senses ... my arteries have sympathy with it."

Just north of the outlet of the brook at Fairhaven Bay is a large marshy or swampy backwater known as Well Meadow. The head of this meadow is included in the Adams land and is, perhaps, that place in Concord where the pulse of spring is first to be felt. At least Thoreau considered it such: "It will take you half a lifetime to find out where to look for the earliest flower. ... At the head of this meadow, where many springs ooze out from under the hill and saturate all the ground ... there look for the earliest skunk-cabbage and cowslip (Marsh Marigold), where some little black rills are seen to meander or heard to tinkle in the middle of the coldest winter."

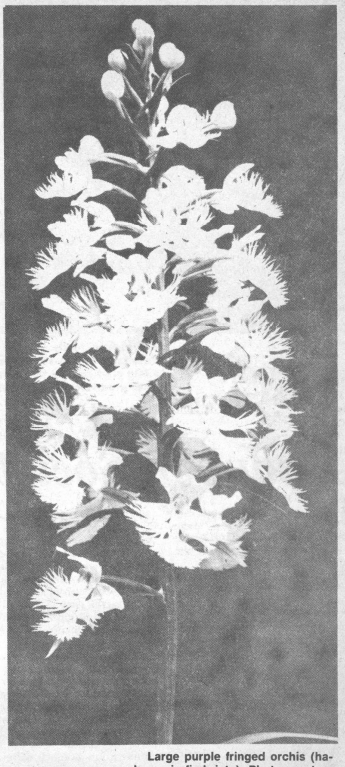
Also at the head of Well Meadow Thoreau found the Large Purple Fringed Orchis, a secretive and graceful flower. Braving the accidents and environmental changes of a busy century, it yet survives at Well Meadow Head but is not flourishing.

The final leg of the Adams boundary cuts through a chain of bog-ponds, the Andromeda Ponds, before returning to the railroad. Bogs are relatively scarce in Middlesex County; the Adams boundary runs through or near five bogs. The largest bog in Concord is the Andromeda Pond that is shaped like a moccasin print, looking "as if Dame Nature had set her foot there, and it had bloomed in consequence." (Thoreau)

"Andromeda" refers to the bog shrub that we know today as Leatherleaf, the predominant cover on the floating mat of sphagnum moss that is the bog. At a particular time of day and year, and from a particular direction, Thoreau witnessed a remarkable play of sunlight through the leaves of "Andromeda" that he compared to the warm red of stained cathedral windows. This "piece of magic" endeared the ponds to him.

The Andromeda Pond closest to Well Meadow is more truly a pond. In this pond the floating mat of bog vegetation forma small island. To aerial observers it must appear to be a staring eye.

As with a large lake, the "shores" of the Adams property are the attraction. Surrounded by the brook, the meadow, and the bog-ponds is a relatively level stretch of oak-pine woods. This real estate holds together one of the very few areas of Concord and west Lincoln that Thoreau, Emerson, and their friends would still recognize and appreciate for the same peace and natrual charm that it possessed over a century ago.



Large purple fringed orchis (habernaria fimbriata). Photo courtesy of the Mills-Conover Gleason Collection.

Lincoln board reviews status of funding drive

By Susan Fargo

The Lincoln selectmen dug in their heels Monday night, demanding a detailed accounting from Conservation Commission Chairman Robert Lemire on the status of the down-to-the-wire fund-raising campaign for the Adams Woods purchase.

A possible Dec. 17 closing date is approaching, and the Proposition 2½-beleaguered selectmen want to insure that there will be enough cash on hand.

Last year the town voted to buy the 87-acre tract from the Adams family for $1 million, provided no town funds were expended.

The state has extended to Dec. 31 the time limit on its $242,000 grant towards the purchase, but those funds will not be available until 45 days after the transfer of property.

The selectmen are concerned about paying interest on that amount for a 45-day period as well as on $30,000 in pledges to be honored after the first of the year.

Lemire reported on some recently-received gifts. Trustees of a Sudbury Valley conservation group have pledged $25,000, and the Concord Garden Club is giving $500.

In describing the hectic, hard-pressed campaign, Lemire said, "Ken Olsen (head of Digital Equipment Corporation) made two gifts of DEC stock to us. The second gift came when the stock was down. Everyone said, 'Lemire will die with it.' We put a stop-loss on it at 84, and it stopped dropping at 85. Now it's up to 97½."

Continued Lemire, "We have about $575,00."

"You're still short," responded Selectmen Chairman Beth Sutherland.

"We'll close on Dec. 17 with what we have," answered Lemire.

"Something might happen still with the transferable development rights in Concord. I think we'll have about $290,000 in cash by then, plus the $86,000 at hand in the treasurer's office. I don't know yet when all the pledge money is forthcoming."

In pressing for more specific figures, Sutherland said, "We made a commitment at Town Meeting not to spend town funds without coming back to the town. We can't accept an albatross around our necks."

At this point in the dialogue, the selectmen moved into executive session for what Executive Secretary Larry Paxton later described as "investigating the alternative ways to mitigate some of the problems involved in such a large land sale."

Lemire, who will prepare a written report for next week, in a telephone interview Tuesday reiterated his belief that the sale would go through with whatever funds were then available.

Garden club gives $500

The Garden Club of Concord has donated $500 to the Adams Woods, the strategic woodland area adjacent to Walden Street park and the Lincoln conservation lands.

Mrs. Roswell Boutwell, president of the Garden Club, states that this contribution carries forth the purpose of the club which is to foster interest and to aid in the preservation, restoration and development of beauty in Concord.

It is the hope of the club that these 87 acres of forest and ponds will not fall into the hands of the developers but can be purchased for the enjoyment of everyone.

Transcription of letter is provided further below.

TELEPHONE CLEARWATER 9-8165

J. Q. ADAMS
ARCHITECT
SOUTH LINCOLN. MASS.

Aug 9, 1981

Dear Mr. Angelo:

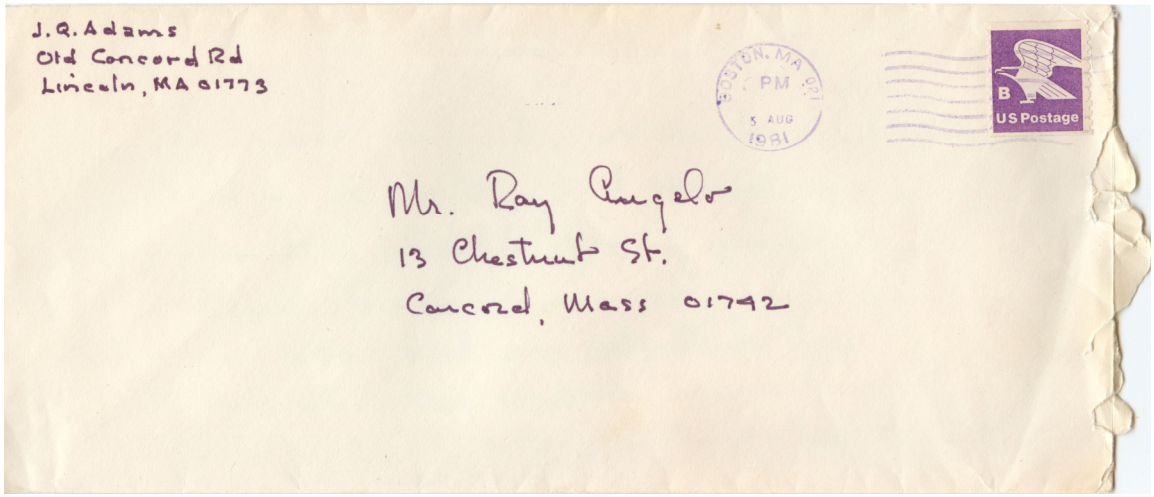
Thank you for the photo of the "purple fringed orchis", it is magnificent and I like to have it in my collection. I also want to thank you for the article you wrote for the Concord Journal on Adams Woods. It is by far the most sensitive and understanding of anything written on the subject.

My wife and I have had to sacrifice a good portion of the land bought from the M. B. Adams estate in 1945, but have been determined to hold intact this land, guarded on the Northeast by Concord Land Trust and on the Southwest by Hemlock Brook and our own land which we feel we can control. We are immensely relieved that it is now safe from development and in permanent conservation. "Adams Woods" is the

colloquial term by which it was known early in the century, and seemed appropriate. Also it is a tribute to my grandfather Charles Francis Adams who came here in 1894 and even at that time envisioned the gradual encroachment of the country side by the metropolis surrounding Boston.

Sincerely

Quincy Adams



Transcription of letter (photo of orchid referred to provided below):

J. Q. Adams
Architect
South Lincoln, Mass.
Aug. 4, 1981

Dear Mr. Angelo:

Thank you for the photo of the "purple fringed orchis", it is magnificent and I like to have it in my collection. I also want to thank you for the article you wrote for the Concord Journal on Adams Woods. It is by far the most sensitive and understanding of anything written on the subject.

My wife and I have had to sacrifice a good portion of the land bought from the M.[ary] O.[gden] Adams [(1843-1935)] estate in 1945, but have been determined to hold intact this land, guarded on the Northeast by Concord Land Trust and on the Southwest by Heywoods Brook and our own land which we feel we can control. We are immensely relieved that it is now safe from development and in permanent conservation. "Adams Woods" is the colloquial term by which it was known early in the century, and seemed appropriate. Also it is a tribute to my grandfather Charles Francis Adams [Jr. (1835-1915)] who came here in 1894 and even at that time envisioned the gradual encroachment of the country side by the metropolis surrounding Boston.

Sincerely,
Quincy Adams

Image of photo of the Large Purple Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera grandiflora*) sent to Quincy Adams taken by Ray Angelo on June 11, 1981 on the Adams Woods property where Henry D. Thoreau had found it.